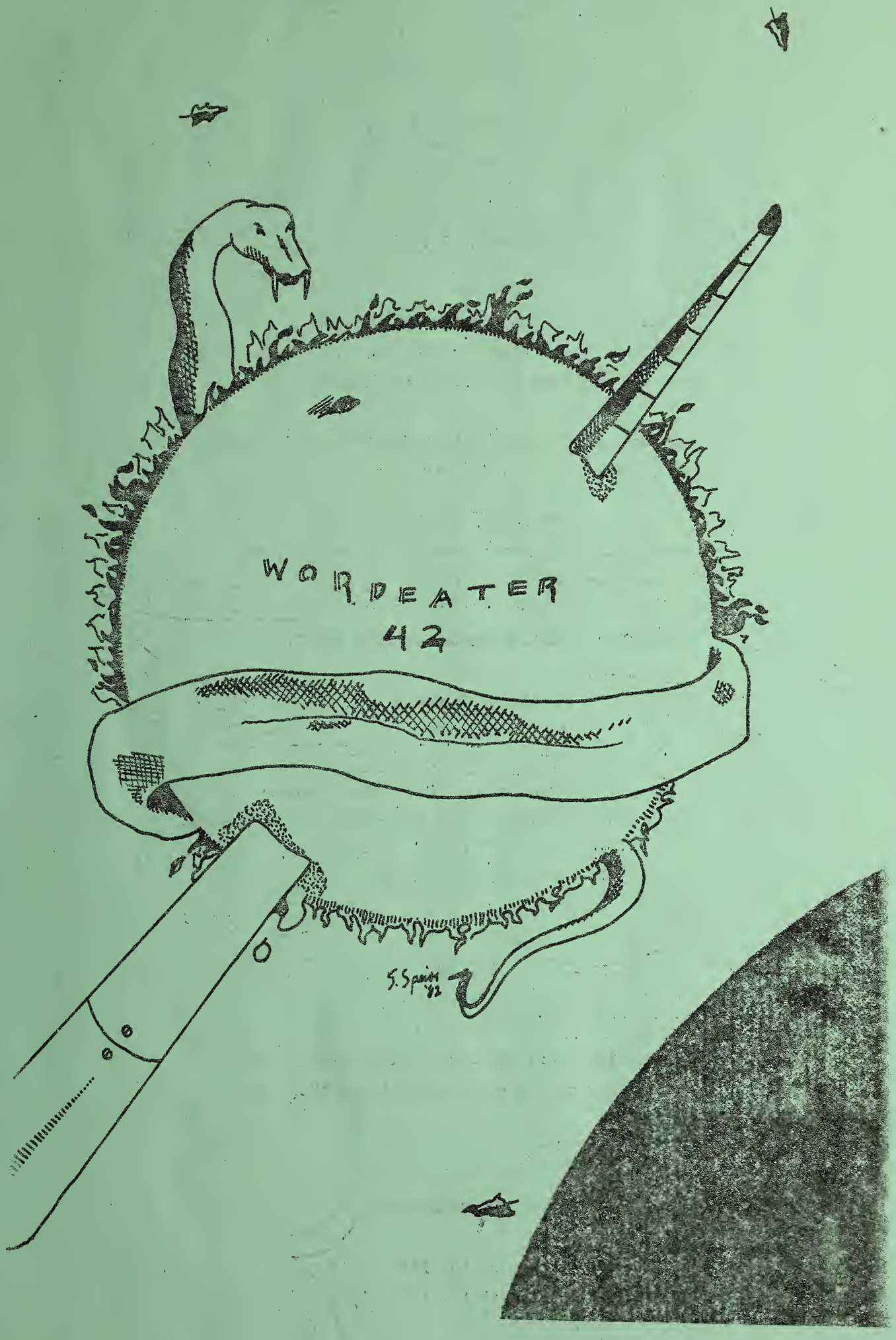
WORDEATER
42
S. Spain '92

WORDEATER XLII STAFF

Randy Varju
David Moore
Steve Faron
John Stobart
Judy Belfield
Maureen Mueller
Michael A. Stillman

To get a submission printed in this issue, four of the above had to vote for acceptance. For the award winner, only John Stobart is responsible.

Manuscripts or cover designs for WORDEATER 43 must be submitted to John Stobart in room C-1069 by

February 15, 1982

Manuscripts will not be returned. They may be anonymous and SHOULD BE TYPED.

WINNER OF THE POETRY AWARD FOR THIS ISSUE:

JAYNE WOODCOCK
$25.00

No prose award this time. Past prize winners are only considered when no new contributors seem worthy.

WORDEATER 42 COVERS:

SCOTT SPIERS
$20.00

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NEXT TWO DEADLINES:

February 15, 1983
April 15, 1983

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****

Stacy Biedermann

FAKE I.D.

Iowa...19
Me...17
Bar...
Brown skull
no, Butchers Block
or McButts
Drink...
Can I?
Will I?
SLAMMER!!

****

David Moore

ORANGE EYES

Orange eyes, red eyes
Yellow eyes, blue
Apple pies, fruit flies
And flowers for you

****

Jill Sorensen

SQUIRM WORMS

A can of Squirm worms
Picked from the licked wet sidewalks,
Squirmy wormy squirmin worms.
Icky, sticky, yicky worms.
Crawling, curving, weaving worms.
Oozing, cruising, losing my worms.
Digging, wiggling, slipping, dipping,
Creaping, leaking, oodles of noodles of worms.
Lost, swallowed in the veins of grass.
A yard of squirmin worms.

****

Stacy Biedermann

PREPPY

The polo ——— player runs,
the alligator walks.
Topsiders and loafers forever...
BUT duck shoes on rainy days.

****

Randy Varju

UNBLINKING EYES

I remember things, sometimes too well, I think.

I have had nothing to do but sit here in my chair and remember times of so many years ago.

Maybe I should put all of your pictures away someplace so I wouldn't be reminded of . . . no, I couldn't possibly do that. What, then, would I look at? Or even think about?

Even if I did put your pictures away, I would still be reminded of you by practically everything around me: the slippers you bought me for Christmas. I hated them then, but would never part with them now. The empty cupboards everytime I look for food and even the pipe I smoke every five minutes.

I remember when you bought me my first pipe and how you loved the aroma.

Damn! I forgot pipe cleaners again. Damn, damn, damn . . . you never forgot to get my pipe cleaners.

Please excuse me while I relight my pipe, wipe my eyes, and blow my nose.

Uhhh . . . it constantly gets more difficult to rise from this chair.

I'll just set your picture here momentarily.

Where did I put that lighter? Here

(continued)

Unblinking Eyes, continued

it is, right next to all of these unanswered sympathy cards. I can't bring myself to even open them.

The flowers are still beautiful, but the smell is too similar to the funeral parlor.

Why couldn't we go together? Like in a car accident or something? I guess that doesn't happen very often. I wonder how you would be if I went first.

Damn! I burned my thumb again! My hand shakes so damn much when I try to light my pipe. You used to hold it so evenly for me.

Strange, until now, I never really noticed how wrinkled my hands have become. The veins are more visible now than I remember, and I don't recall ever noticing the grey hairs on my knuckles. I suppose I'm getting much older than I realized.

I never realized how old you were either until the morning I found you . . . the veins in your hands were visible then also.

I remember waking and wiping the sleep from my eyes. I rolled over to wake you, but you didn't awake . . . I felt only your cold skin.

Oh . . . how I remember your opened eyes and expressionless face. That's all I remember. I try to remember all of the pleasant smiles, and how everyone said I should remember you, but somehow I simply can't. That expressionless face with . . . with unblinking eyes is in every picture of you I see.

I must try to change my thoughts. It is not healthy for one of my age to ponder such thoughts.

There he is, the little kitten my wonderful grandchildren gave me to keep me company. Friendly young kitten.

Hmmm . . . what should I name you? Let me see . . . a white kitten with blue eyes. Blue eyes? I never noticed. You do have very pretty blue eyes.

Do you see that picture? Well, she was my . . . or is my wife. Well, she had very pretty blue eyes . . . something like yours.

What? What was that? A sharp . . . sting in my chest all the way through my left arm.

I can't believe this. I can't breathe. I knew this would happen.

Where is the phone book? I can't find the phone book! You always knew where those things were.

No . . . hold it. I think . . . I'm ready.

I'll just lay down here . . . and this time I . . . I won't . . . phone the doctor . . .

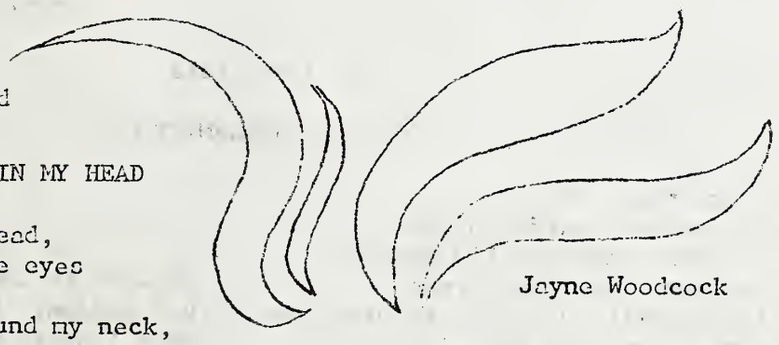
****

Judy Belfield

THERE ARE BABIES IN MY HEAD

There are babies in my head,
babies with shiny blue eyes
and fat little arms
that try to reach 'round my neck,
but can't quite,
babies with pouty, puckered lips
and sugared voices that giggle
while sunshine plays Mozart
in their platinum curls,
babies toddling through unmarked years
where age cannot touch them
and time cannot breathe on their bones.

****



Jayne Woodcock

SCENE PLAYED UPON THE DAMPNESS OF AN INNER EYELID

Darkdown gentle horizon lying
Mouth and wetness moving
Samesoft seen from far, now
down, down, down
Whywherewarm? A fingertip
Two, three, five
Handhearthold--who it is. taste
Tongue, tears, touch
Darkdew gentle horizon falling
Liquid we are moving

****

Nancy Lockhart

RED TO ME

I used to love the moon.
I sat in her lap of light
Where I took my white suppers
All my white days
While she read to me.
I'd watch the moon
Tuck snuff up under her lip,
Then spit on the stars.
Or sometimes I'd ride the moon
Like a goose.
Her argent feathers cool
Against my thighs.
Then I'd roll her home
To the left side of night
For a nap.

Now there's a blood spot
On the moon.
A clot in the eye.
She is blind.
She is bald.
She is broken.
Deformed by some
Scarlet contagion,
Like an apple bite
Stuck in the throat,
We, too, shall choke
By inheritance.

****

Michael A. Stillman

SYNCHRONICITY

Both Zen Buddhism
And quantum physics
State that every particle
In the universe
Is interconnected.

My father was born
The same year
The Hindenburg crashed.

Get it?

****

Jayne Woodcock

BITTERNESS

It's the color of dirty oil on the water
The word on the lips of every father's daughter
The spark in the eye of a thing that's dying
The catch in the sound of abrasive crying
It's the burn of a match that licks your finger
Gone in an instant; prone to linger
Clean as a knife cut; easy as pie
Catch a falling star and watch it die

****

Judy Belfield

YOU WERE SPEARMINT GUM

You were spearmint gum
and movies on Saturday nights,
movies about Indians with arrows.
We crawled into a silver screen
splattered with purplish, 1950's blood,
the dark theater of our lives
where Susan Hayward kissed Gary Cooper
and they both rode off
into the sunset.
We were alive,
though I'd been wounded by Comanches
in places that didn't show--
and back at home,
when midnight and silence fell,
the thunder of hoofbeats invaded my dreams,
and deadly weapons pierced my skin.
A great band of braves
whooped in the darkness
but suddenly became still
when I heard you snoring
in the next room,
and their painted horses galloped away
in a cloud of spearmint.

****

Jill Sorensen

CHOICES

It is said to me by the wise advisors today,
To sail confidently in the direction
of your dreams.
With this I will find
a meaningful, priceless pay.

But I see a tempting mirage
beside me now.
If I turn towards my dream
will you still be there when
I reach backwards, beckoning for your hand?
--OR--
Will this mirage that you and I
inhabit slip quietly out of
my hand--
and turn to forgotten sand?

****

David Moore

HOLIDAY PRESENCE

Bland limestone entrails
Are my gift for this season of cheer
Maybe I'll do better
Just give me a year

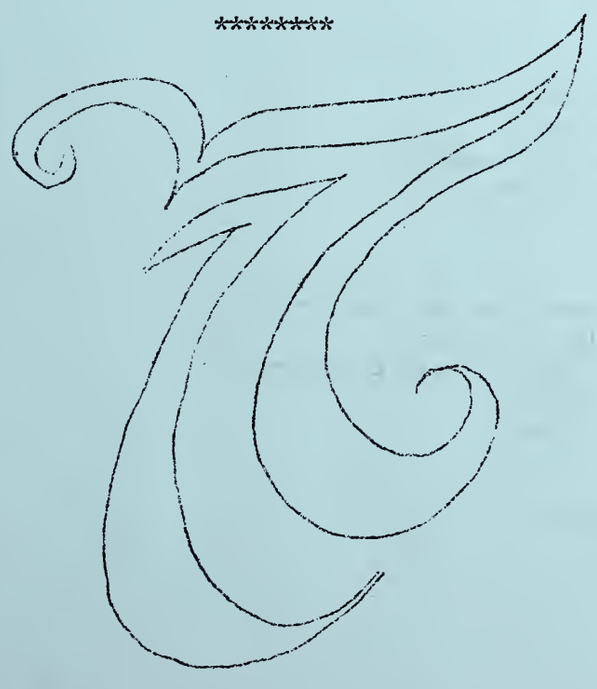
Have a galactic chasm
It can swallow your stars
Here is a gift
That won't get you far

A vacation in Hell
For husbands and wives
It's just the thing
To end dual lives

Hairy simians
That will strip your flesh
They're just the thing
To make you feel touched

Or would you prefer gifts of the spirit?

****



Jayne Woodcock

LAUGHING

There is a choice to make, a step to
take
Farewell Mother, I am ready
Although I have been advised otherwise
With each breath I take, I am more cer-
tain than I was the moment before
For here I sit, chin cupped close in
hand
Knees drawn up tight to my gently
rocking body
Knowing a little more and laughing a
little with myself
At myself

****

Judy Belfield

CONDITIONAL ABSOLUTION

Bless you, Brother,
for you have sinned
against the God
who is so perfectly perfect,
he gets angry when your crotch dances.
Zip up them thighs
and say your good-byes--
ever so politely.
Spend an hour in the shower,
offer your goosepimples as penance,
and kiss your momma good-night.
It's all very right and well,
and anyone will tell you
your flyspeck existence
is being watched minutely
by the demons of hell
and, most of all,
by the Big-Shot-Up-There
every second, every moment--
and if you listen very closely,
you can hear yourself crack,
like a too-delicate glass
in the dishwasher.
Occasions of sin are everywhere--
find the keys to a cave in the desert,
starve your body, empty your mind,
and pray, Brother, pray til you rot.
There aint nothin in life worth havin,
an you gotta pass through it quickly,
with an eye on that other life--
the only one that's real--
and don't ask no questions.

****

Judy Bolfield

SENSITIVITY AND SILENCE

My green-paper iris
sees lazy, sepia-tinted cats,
screeching eagles,
and airy, festering, felt-tip
Bics
that click like teeth
in the milk-white moonlight
of euphoric insomnia
and narcoleptic dreams.
Screams of psychoneurons
echo in deaf chasma
and wail through sacroiliac nightmares.

I am poisoned by the needle of vision
as it scratches the eardrums
of Indian summer
which spills over the crackling ice
of time's lost bootlace.
Sing me slings and arrows:
spare the mercy
and slay the child
of days wedged in a chocolate pie
of tedium.

I'm tired, so tired,
John,
but I'm waiting for the elevator
you said you'd send
through the jetlag fog.
Were you sleeping
the night they burned the library
in Alexandria?

****

David Moore

NIMBUS NINE IS SO FINE

Lo unto the shattered crystal prison
Where time and space begin
Here to make fate's last stand
And play the fetus band

I have no eyes with which to see
And I forgot my lunch
I have no blue skies above me
Just the stellar crunch

Lurch in the direction of the infinity
tower
Boiling with its turbulent power
Clouds of vaporous mentality
Plead to find finality

The green shores of Gaston Beach
Are far beyond my reach
As all the people begin to preach
That they found love's dream
In a box of bleach
I hear the heavens screech

Let it depart
And lift the veil of my illness

****

Jayne Woodcock

I DREAM

I dream
Myriad of purples, blues and tears--throbbing, sobbing music
A sorrow gnaws deep, parasitic and festering
Then wells back up to my pocked but placid surface
Bursting through swollen pores in a bloody, pulpy
mass of green, pustulent
Sorrow
I dream
Cool, liquid meditation--gentle implosion
Freedom unknown to the physical side
It smacks of the sweet nothingness of untouch
Deep delving, prime escape route, warm womb
boundless, non-void, swelling
Freedom
I dream
Hot, fervent, churning-desires--boastful probabilities
To be or ought to be? That is the question
To which I address the energies ofmy impudent imagination
Patronizing the God of Fatuous Fantasy
'til thought and action merge
I dream

****

Dave O'Brien

I SYMPATHIZE

Brain death, death of emotions
Ships sink
How deep is the ocean?
Dark inviting forest
The elders knew the answers
No rolling the odds

I died once, maybe five times
In my sleep
Awake, but subliminal
Can you challenge this?
I thought not.
Rolling over, sad and electric

Eternal light? Hello mother!
Children die
One man bows to another
Did you have Glory?
Or did the race bring you down
Down to the worm and the ground

He let the earth run through his fingers
His odor no more lingers
He let the dust run through his fingers
Everyone cried; I sympathize

****

David Moore

HAVE A NICE DAY

Are there any grains of intellect
on the beaches of your mind?
Are you unaware of the maximum multitude
of doorways to Pandora's leaking box
There is no challenge to your supremacy here

Dark hate clouds and rolling dreams,
all to enrage the still waters
Being to all things as all things shall never be
Listening to the waves of nights engulfing,
tattered wings

Looking across the wastelands of your reality,
But there is no other side
All I see are carnivorous star maggots
Infesting metaphysical feces
With overly melodramatic finesse
The grave of possibilities is now!
None will weep for you, save yourself
Gods that aren't, loves that weren't
A corner of your life's true reality,
die in the daylight of greater reality

Sad scavenger, awake to your plight
Futile grandeur--that is truly what you feel
That is the nature of your human emotions

I speak from nowhere
I speak for you

****

Judy Belfield

CAVEWOMAN

I was taught how not to be taut
like the strings on tennis racquets,
but the racket inside my head
is tense with the noise
of discordant violins,
and the strings moan like wolves
at the whole moon.
There are holes in my brain
where the plugs have been pulled,
and a pool of burned-out neurons
gurgles down some unseen drain.
I pretend to be steel,
to have no Achilles' heel,
yet I am all heel
and my soul is spotted
like the cheetah's coat,
which is warm and lovely, really.
Oatmeal and jello
in a metaphysical blender,
my thoughts are at once
repulsively thick and fabulously light.
Is there light
at the end of this tunnel,
and why doesn't Plato answer his phone?

****

Michael A. Stillman

I WAS THERE

Once
When I was tired
I painted faces
On my fingernails
And then
I bit them all off.

****

Jayne Woodcock

TOMORROW CAME WHILE I WAS SLEEPING

Tomorrow came while I was sleeping
Waited on the doorstep, weeping
Knocked until its knuckles bled
But I was tucked away in bed
I had yearned; it seemed forever
For the gifts it would deliver
As deep into the night I sank
I sipped on sleep, then greedily drank
At last I woke to greet the day
But it had long since crept away
On the step where it had lain
A mark like fresh whitewash and pain
Tomorrow came while I was sleeping
Waited on the doorstep, weeping
Tomorrow came, but didn't stay
The stain it left is yesterday

****

Judy Belfield

NO SCALES FOR THE FISH

I fit this time
like a steam-engine in Mary-Mary's garden,
like an apple core
among the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle.
My time rides on a gust of air
into the warps between seasons,
into the slotted pockets of moments between moments.
It creaks and settles
like a great heap of rusted-out cars,
and sings a clattering song
through my junkyard life.
This time isn't mine--
this pendulum rhythm of monotony
beating regularly
and drawn up into neatly measured little intervals.
Dontt bother to look for me
in the midnight of yesterday
or the noon of today--
my echo hasn't yet arrived.

****

David Moore

IN THE GARDEN

There's an old Chinaman in my garden
Sculpted out of the grim grey stone
Gouged from the core of the primal earth
itself

He stoops in the center of the pond
Crouching like an antique hermit
Alert for the approach of others
His purpose in life consists of
spewing fountains of knowledge
Into a pool full of
slimy, sliding algae
lilting, lofty lily pads
and gleaming, glittering goldfish
coyly darting amongst aquatic plants

The old Chinaman drools and spits
Recycling the stale waters
Renewing the vigor of each drop
As they fly through the avian realm
To return to their peaceful homelands
Only to cause ripples
That disturb the serenity

And the birds are singing too!

****

Stacy Biedermann

CONFUSED???

No reaction,
no reply,
all I get
is a turn of the eye.
What should I say?
What should I do?
What's going on . . .
between me and you?

****

David Moore

VEGETABLE MINDS

Vegetable minds
Leafy in the sunlight
No harvest of understanding

****

Nancy Lockhart

I SHALL READ FOR THEM

I shall read for them
But they won't hear my green vegetable
words
Their ears are filled with cotton
candy.
They are sugar heads,
High on their own sweetness.
They lick left and right
For a taste of themselves,
While my steam table verse,
Like the odor of fish,
Is absorbed by the walls.

David Moore

WITCHCRAFT AURA

Witchcraft aura
Of the nameless pentagram
Where all ends begin

****

Jayne Woodcock

MORE SHORT CLIPS FROM THE INNER EYELID THEATER

One
The light diffuses and reconcentrates to create new shapes
As I move from this parched reality to a never green world, saying
"Excuse me while I slip into something less plausible"
My senses dulled during the transition, now grow sharp, sharper
As the new forms flicker, then become static
The focal point of my present possible reality turns
And brushes the hair from his eyes
(This means hello), and
Two
I rise, and motioning forward with an empty hand
Touch warmth--a tactile arm's length
Eyes intent, I observe the form
Pale, supple, throbbing with inner warm-blue glow
Bending near, a taste fills my mouth and lungs
A dampness upon my upper lip, salt-sweet
Like the flavour of sweat and honey
(This is actualization), but
Three
Suddenly, light snaps back to its original focus setting with a jarring
click
The desert returns, my oasis a mere mirage that vanished with the lifting
of the heat
And life again lies cool and dry upon the tongue

****

Judy Belfield

SATIS VERBORUM

I

Introductions.
Shake hands with words
which smile politely.
Well-tutored by Emily Post,
they are held from gaping
by the braces of etiquette,
yet turn around
and catch their condescension
in your back.

II

Hello.
My name is Incompetence.
I cannot speak a coherent paragraph
to save my soul.

III

Words were arranged
like a formal dinner,
but Senor Diablo
had spiced every plate generously
with arsenic.
All the guests died
with napkins on their laps.
Each was about to grasp
the second fork on the right
which was placed three inches
diagonally
from each water goblet.

IV

Words drizzled today,
but the drops took a reverse course
and crashed into the stratosphere.
Shakespeare's bones groaned
and Francis Bacon's ghost
burned the toast.
Feathered pens were raised
in disgust,
and snapped like the lances of Apaches:
a treaty had been broken
and phrases of war
were painted by monks
on long, white banners
which unfurled in the gray sky
of ignorance.

V

Hello.
My name is Vulgarity.
Damn you all
for your civilized ways.
I do not care a whit
for your dressed-up words
as they sit in the assemblages
created by your cultured ancestors,
who knew nothing of discord.

VI

Perfection,
always perfection,
an abstract goal
glowing outside the cave.
Plato knew the words to tell the way
but did not mark the treasure with an X.

VII

Hello.
My name is Despair.

****

Jayne Woodcock

ETHOLOGUES

There is mood, there is movement
There is expression and feeling
There is power in your art, power in your silence
All caught between two bats of an eye
But like unexperienced mimes
We find that without the initial word
Inserted for clarity
There is unsurety

****

David Moore

THE COSTUME MILLENIA

The costume millenia is here again
And all of our disguises remain the same
Our lives are but actions
This party's a game
And such an existence
Gives us no name

Who are you?
Gowned in mists of blue
Eyes toward the distances
Harvesting nuances
Consummated at dawn

****

Michael A. Stillman

BUDDHA IN A JAR

In the biology lab resides a Buddha in a jar. Many students visit him when they feel nervous, depressed, or just plain out of touch with their Buddha-natures. By studying the serene expression on his face, a calmness and spirit of tranquility can be attained by those who have the capability to let the world roll off their shoulders. Or so the believers claim.

A Dissenting Opinion

Some students claim that the Buddha in a jar is really not a Buddha after all. They point to the label and say, "See, it's just a fetus, with no redeeming meditative value." Then they smirk condescendingly and walk away.

Reality Lives In A Dead Dog's Eye

It is well known that some people are unable to think in abstract terms. They see everything in black-and-white, and cannot even imagine the myriad shades of gray. They think that clams can't sing, that horses can't fly, and that an objective reality exists independent of the participant-observer. The concept of subjective reality, what Heraclitus called the ideas koinos, is not for them.

Judy Belfield

PILLAR OF SALT

Don't be offended
  if I call you Lot's wife--
  I'm not confused about your gender.
Like her,
  you stand lone and windblown
  at the edge of the Dead Sea.
  I ask if you'd ever been to Sodom,
  or walked the nectar-splattered streets
                of Gomorrah.
I'm curious, you see.
I'd also like to know
  what you thought of the conflagration.

****

Judy Belfield

I WATCHED YOU THE DAY YOU WERE UGLY

I watched you the day you were ugly.
  You glimpsed your face in a looking glass
  and saw a secret disfigurement of soul,
  a blemish you made much too large.
You were Medusa,
  turning everyone to stone
  who dared to look,
  but did you know
  that when you looked into the mirror
  you turned yourself to stone?

I watched you the day you were ugly.
  I couldn't speak
  but I was crumbling.

****

A Random Seduction

It was in early January that I first noticed her attending one of my lectures. I was relating quantum physics to the poetry of Verlaine and other symbolists. She sat near the back of the hall, apart from the other students, and wore a red dress that

(continued)

Buddha In A Jar, continued

displayed both cleavage and nostril hair. After forty years of egalitarian relationships, I decided to treat her as a sex object.

She Came
to my office later and leaned over the desk, asking irrelevant questions about Schrodinger's Cat and Fetes Galantes. Her tongue swept over her lower lip suggestively, and small beads of perspiration mingled with the fine downy hair on her forehead.

We went to a small cafe. We drank. She told me about her Arts Foundation grant and we discussed the Impressionists. The waiter was an arrogant elitist named Raoul. I left only a minimal tip.

When she left my apartment slightly before dawn she neglected to lock the door. When I awoke my stereo and most of my records were gone. I began boiling water for coffee.

A Poem About Penguins

They're tuxedo-clad,
Pretentious nomads.

They seem dignified,
Almost snide.

But when they waddle,
With open throttle,

We look and laugh,
Like drunken giraffes.

For they look so silly--
Those Chilly Willys.

Splay-Footed Hydras
are creatures of habit. Like nuns. Or Derek Nunney, the well-known capitalist.

--They look like smart dogs. What are their names?

--Muffin and Marshmellow.

Jayne Woodcock

UNTITLED

He always wore a roof wherever he was going
Boarded up the windows so he couldn't see it snowing
Wore galoshes so his feet wouldn't get wet or dirty
Rolled up the sidewalk by seven-thirty
Drank warm milk from disposable glasses
Didn't read the paper--didn't watch the telly
Dressed in an impeccable, bullet-proof sweater
And slept all alone 'cos he didn't know better

****

--Yeah? What kinda stuff can they do?

--Well, Muffin is continuing Einstein's search for a Unified Field Theory, and Marshmellow is translating Dostoevsky into some Aleutian dialects for the Eskimos.

--Oh, okay.

A Strange Band Of Musicians
and their rag-tag followers, playing unearthly progressions as if their lives depended on it. Who's to say what's the truth? they ask. The world awaits an answer.

The Spotted Flycatcher
belongs to the Muscicapidae family. It haunts woods, copses, lanes, and gardens. Although its plumage is inconspicuous, it is a favorite of birdwatchers. This is due to its amusing eating habits. Nearly invisible at the top of its favorite stick or stone, it will suddenly dart out from its perch after a luckless insect, twisting and turning in the air in such a convulsive manner that even the most level-headed vermin will experience a near-total befuddlement. This is depravity at its best. The Spotted Flycatcher makes a high squeak, like a blender in need of repair, and a scolding "wee-tuc-tuc" when in distress.

Opinionated And Biased
Most Westerners should not attempt to write haiku. They seem to believe that all that is required is the ability to count out seventeen syllables, and they ignore the more important considerations of mood, tone, and subject matter.

Before writing haiku, try this simple three-dimensional Rorschach test. Go to the Bio Lab and look at the jar on the shelf. If you see a smiling Buddha, you can take the cap off your pen. If you see a fetus in misery, stick to romantic slush and diatribes against abortion.

For More Details
about the Buddha in a jar, talk to someone who has had class in its residence, like Herman Hesse.

****

Randy Varju

GOSSIP

Grapes aren't going on a vacation this year,
That son of theirs was arrested again. Won't he ever
Grow up? I just don't know what goes
On in his demented mind. He always walks down
The street without ever saying hi. I heard through the grape-
Vine that he was caught with drugs this time. His parents
Are a little strange too. Why else would they
Only ground that young degenerate? He should have
A whippin like I had when I was
Small. Next, he'll drop out of school and try to live off of that
Part-time immoral job
Of his playing in that rock band. By
The way, have you heard about the nuclear power
Plant they're going to build next door?

****

Judy Belfield

THAT THURSDAY AFTERNOON

That Thursday afternoon,
sprawled out across the sky,
didn't hang itself,
as planned,
on the beaks of eagles,
but rather,
rode on hummingbirds' wings,
jumping fitfully
as its life frittered away.
It was a beast of a day,
a panther growling in its sleep
with claws at the ready,
a nail-studded steamiron
that shredded and scorched the silken
afternoon.

Thursday,
when the gnats gathered in
the tatted shawls of humidity
and simpered in the sizzling footprints
of God . . .

Thursday,
the day before the rains broke loose
and thumbed their way to New Jersey.

****

Michael A. Stillman

MARCELLA

With a full deck of credit cards,
She shopped solitaire.

Listening to a Muzak version
of "Yesterday,"
she thought,
Isn't there more than this?

****

Maureen Mueller

STREET RAINBOWS

An oil slick . . .
Steamed with each
overripe radiator drizzle,
Asphalt smeared,
Laced with
tire-treaded gum wads
and unidentifiable gutterbits.
Yet . . .
Strangely impressive,
An irridescent palette
under the vapor light.
Even sludge is art.

****

Michael A. Stillman

DESTINY

Peter O'Hara began the day by going to the mailbox and looking for a residual check. The payments had been arriving irregularly, sporadically, for twenty-eight years, ever since he had first found employment ("temporary," he had called it then) as a movie extra. He was paid to look anonymous, nondescript, blandly commonplace. He was good at it.

Today there was no check--only The Times and a couple of bills. He returned to the house, screendoor slamming behind him ("Needs a new spring," he thought), and plugged in the coffee pot. Feeling something tug at his foot, he looked down to see Maxine, an eccentric blur of whiteness, chewing on his slipper, and he reached for the cat food.

Poor Maxine, he thought. Always second priority. Always subordinate to my own needs. She really should be an equal partner around here.

Peter poured each of the four cat foods into its own compartment in the

(continued)

large bowl, and added the usual tonic to three of them. He placed the bowl on the floor, next to his own place at the small table, and added an extra treat as an afterthought.

Maxine had been his only companion since his wife died eight years earlier. The days were spent watching television, doing crossword puzzles, and waiting for a casting director to pick his name off a list and phone. Some evenings he would substitute in a bridge club and proudly point out his face in its brief moments on the screen.

He filled his first pipe of the day and browsed through the newspaper ads, looking for the best prices on hedge-trimming equipment. The coffee began percolating and he stood up, chair legs screeching across the linoleum.

Hitler screamed in his cage, waking Marcella. She opened her eyes and cursed, irritated at the bird. Rolling out of bed, her bones crackled like a well-known breakfast cereal, and she began to pour seed between the bars of the cage and into the bin. Chirping in satisfaction, Adolf pecked at the grain.

The parakeet had been named by Vivian, her mah-jong partner and best friend. They had been up late drinking creme liquers and idly making card-houses out of the mah-jong tiles, discussing their former husbands. Suddenly Vivian had dropped her tiles and exclaimed, "I know! Let's name the little pecker after Hitler!" and so the bird was christened with a bottle of Bristol.

Marcella smiled at the memory and opened the door to her salon-bathroom. It was furnished in chrome and tile, with publicity stills of well-known actors of the 40's between the mirrors. The large pink bathtub stretched before her invitingly. She poured in crystals and turned on the water. As the tub slowly filled she examined her figure in the full-length mirrors, lit by track lights. She looked a decade younger than her forty-eight years, cheekbones high and eyebrows arched attractively even without makeup. She did skin-tone exercises until the tub was full.

She climbed into the warm suds and began to plan her afternoon. I haven't had a day off in months, she remarked to herself. I deserve this one. A big day of browsing and buying in the mall. Maybe look over the new line of makeup at Darlene's. Get my hair done. Buy a pair of slacks for that party. What else do I need? I know I had something else in mind--what was it?

She leaned back in the tub, wondering and the sunlamp's timer kept ticking . . .

Later that day, shoppers walked amidst manicured trees and survey-takers in the atrium of Orchard Gardens Mall. Vague pop tunes, performed by "The 101 Strings," oozed in the background, attempting to offend none and relax all.

Peter O'Hara was looking over the Meerschaums at Nick's Tobacco Shop, wondering when a new shipment would arrive. He bought a pouch of "Billing's Black Oak," his favorite tobacco, and strolled out the door.

Marcella happened to be walking near the same door, laden with packages. As their paths were about to intersect, she dropped a large bag.

Peter stared into the middle distance and stepped onto the elevator.

****

Mary Ann Gilman

BEDLAM

Being a reclining species, humans have many varied uses for beds. When a mother gives birth, she is usually on some type of bed. The newborn is laid in a bed immediately after birth. All through life, beds play an important part in supporting our bodies for a portion of each day when we sleep.

Sleep, of course, is only one use for beds. There are beds of sin, which are not always located in brothels. Marriage beds are legalized beds of sin, but some marriage beds remain pure. When someone in our society asks, "Do you want to go to bed?" they are not necessarily inquiring as to whether you are sleepy.

Although bouncing beds are sometimes caused by sexual activity, they may also be caused by playful children jumping, rolling, and pillow fighting, instead of taking their naps. The bouncing bed can be avoided by bedding down children on pallets made of blankets laid on the ground or the floor. These blankets need not be filled with goose-down like the famous Grandma's feather bed, which provided enough bounce for any child.

When sick or tired, we stay in bed. Some beds are specially designed for the sick and bedridden. Bedpans and bedside manner are important aspects of care for these sick people. For the sick who won't

(continued)

recover, there are deathbeds; however the death bed is not necessarily the final resting place.

A bed can be a sanctuary, though not necessarily a hideaway bed. Comforters are used as covers, but can also be comforting to lie on when sad and lonely and in need of a good cry. Any type of comforter will do when you're feeling down.

Breakfast in bed can be a treat, unless bedrolls are served. Queens and Kings are frequently catered to in bed, but not everyone who sleeps in a Queen- or King-sized bed is treated royally.

Bedbugs in the bedclothes can be a bother, but when they get into nightclothes, it can become a nightmare. Bedtime stories are often followed by goodnight phrases of "Sleep tight, and don't let the bedbugs bite." Playing asleep is sometimes unwise when your mother says, "Get out of bed, you sleepyhead."

Then the task of making the bed follows getting out of the bed. Some beds have only sheets in warm climates. These sheets may be fitted or flat, but are usually rumpled after a night's sleep. Bedding may also consist of blankets, quilts, and a decorative spread. Beds may be made in military style, even if they aren't bunks or cots.

Changing beds includes removal of the bedding and replacing them with clean, but it also implies changing partners in bed, which goes along with a line from Shakespeare's Tempest, "Misery acquaints a man with strange bedfellows." Changing beds is often the result of "Sleeping Single in a Double Bed," which is the title of a popular song performed by Barbara Mandrell. Another of her songs is "You Can Eat Crackers in My Bed Anytime." Most of us know how detestable cracker crumbs in bed can be.

As Christmas nears, we are reminded of the baby Jesus sleeping in a manger for a bed. A number of improvisations have been made for baby beds, from baskets to drawers to boxes.

Most of us have bedrooms for our beds. Modern bed structures include wooden or metal frames and enclosed springs. Mattresses are often filled with cotton or synthetic fibers and additional springs, but some are water-filled. Many shapes and sizes of beds are available today.

Finally, since sleep is the greatest reason for having a bed, we can hit the sack, hit the hay, or light for the night, which is my intended use for my bed now. Samuel Pepy wrote in his diary in 1660, "And so to bed," and I concur.

****

Judy Belfield

MESSAGES

The morning after Gaius bled
in the senate portico,
perhaps all of Gaul's three parts cheered,
and that ancient roar echoed
through the back streets of Paris
centuries later,
as the shadow of a misshapen man
hobbled home one smoky night
after the cabarets had snuffed their lights.
Perhaps he heard the thunder of beggars' rags
from another time
when LeFarge screamed through the city.
Time and silence followed him home
where he recorded a sallow-faced lady
who stares seductively into today.
A sea of turquoise crashes around her,
and in the blur of blue and green,
anonymous voices of then
shout to anonymous voices of now.
In the midst of it all,
a small man wearing a tall black hat
smiles.

****

Maureen Mueller

SWEET PARADOX

Magritte symbols
removed from the whole--
His hands . . .
Disembodied strength
chiseled of Carerra marble.
His gestures . . .
Windsong movements
wrinkling the stillness
with gentle music.

****

David Moore

ALL MOURNINGS UNDER THE SUN

All mournings under the sun
Shall be blinded by strange lightnings . . .
Tears of the gods streaking the skies
with electrical pain
Heavy dewdrops hang from gallows of grass
And they fall as their own weepings.

****

Maureen Mueller

NIGHT

In darkness--
Bottled like a djinni
ready at a touch to break free
he waits for the necessary magic--
Perhaps . . .
In another mode of time or being
(in one of those mystical
Mediterranean nights . . .)
But she is no dreamer--
she lies an emotional continent away
breathing in the "real" world--
In darkness.

****

Judy Belfield

ANOTHER DREAM OF SCIPIO

All the worlds rolled slowly
in the vast, black sky,
Like immense ball bearings in a mammoth machine,
steady, shining, sure,
apace with the thoughts of gods--
And there stood Scipio,
a mite in the midst of monstrosity
with the chorus of heaven in his ears--
a microscopic man
floating in infinity's cup
of dark, sweet wine.

The ages close
between the day of Rome and now,
are drawn together like purse strings,
the threads of centuries kissing each other
at the knot of today,
as though no time had passed--
And Scipio interlaces his fingers with eternity,
awaiting the full-year's end,
when his name shall be forgotten.

****

Judy Belfield

NIGHTSONG

A softly warm and shadowed evening--
just at twilight--
when the ghosts of afternoon
flutter and fade into memory,
and breezes,
gently sighing,
roll the darkness in . . .
It's then the whispering voices of the ages
breathe the verses of their souls,
no longer caged in yellowed pages,
or locked within the ink of words--
which cannot tell
the truth of thoughts--
but floating free,
they drift on melodies
inseparable from the wind.

The timelessness of man
and the dreams of a thousand years
caress the dying colors of day,
haunting the dusk
with a silent chorus of passions.

****

David Moore

NOAH

There are many people in the sea
Looking up at you
There are many people in the sea
They're a lovely shade of blue

Now their lives are over
And there were none to lend a hand
None save gentle Noah
Who wasn't trapped on land

Good will, good will, good will to all
But hardly after Satan's fall
Who says we're all in the same boat?
It's so much easier to let them float

"Carcass, carcass in the sea
Why do you stare at me?
It's not as though I wished you ill
Listen, listen--t'was God's will
you do believe me?
don't you?

****

Jayne Woodcock

THERE WAS A WIND

There was a wind. It was only a little wind, but it blew promise in our faces as we walked down the road to satori--"It can't be more than a mile or so," you assured me. The surrounding air was thick and cool with the scent of fresh-crushed foliage and new earth, and as you squeezed my hand, I laughed, for the starshine tickled my eyelids and numbed my lips, numb enough already. The path was rough and narrow, hard-packed earth beneath our feet, but we neither stumbled, nor left the road to satori to walk in the tall, soft-looking grass that lay to either side of us, waving invitingly in the breeze. We were alone there, no light, no life save for the nature that closed in around our souls and squeezed us breathless with its beauty until exhaustion lay sweet and light within our breasts--still on we walked.

Lights swam into view in the near distance, cold, sickly, electric illuminations spilling out of metal-edged windows and warehouse doors; it was as if a dull knife had ripped through the silky flesh of the night, exposing the infection beneath the perfection. The light was diseased, the color of old pus, and it beckoned us onward with rotting fingers--I could smell the decay of flesh, the rancid fat torn from skin and meat, left to melt in anonymous lumps upon cold concrete floors, but predominant was the thick, hot stench of fresh blood, a recent kill, and the scent stunned and stoned our senses into revulsion. Your hand trembled in mine and I glanced up quickly, recognizing the fear in your eyes as my own. Still, here the road to satori led, here and then beyond, but it was here that destiny would have us tarry awhile on our journey. We hid in the half-darkness, whispering nothing, watching the sharp-edged death-machines rumble metallically over the broken earth; only a few did we actually see, but we knew the rest were only hidden, for we heard their voices, a thousand howls of lust and madness echoing through and around the corrugated metal of their lairs. You held your trembling fingers to my lips as a brief gesture of caution, and mind in mind, we slipped around the dark edges of this nightmarish reality until, creeping into a hopefully uninhabited building on the outskirts of the compound, we found what the road had led us here to see, the source of the sickening odor, the very core of evil revealed. In the shimmering light of the temple we stood, reviled, for there was blood on the floor, blood on the walls, blood on the raised metal sacrificial slabs--wet blood, warm blood, sticky beneath our feet and it stank horribly. With reverence for the evil that inhabited this place, we turned together and fled silently, back to the wind and the road.

Set free by the other side of experience, we walked again down the road to satori, away from the light, away from the stench, away from the death, holding each other, laughing, dancing. "Almost there!" cried a tiny voice in my head, and I think you heard it too, for we celebrated wordlessly together. The road was wider now, and smoother--we were still running, dancing, stopping, holding, running some more--"Almost there!" cried the voice again, louder this time, so it must have been true. Our joy was alive and uncontained --maybe a step more, maybe two, maybe three--I could taste it upon my tongue, the perfection of the night, the stars, the little wind . . . but suddenly the friendly grumble of a four-wheeled vehicle cut short our celebration, as the headlights of the old truck split the night. The truck slowed, and the spell was broken, but not the spirit, for although enlightenment had eluded us, at least for tonight, our elation remained intact, and you turned to me with a smile and said, "We'll have to do this again sometime."

****

David Moore

FARMLAND

it seems so unreal
Standing in the Plutonium cornfiels
Atoms dancing 'round my fingertips
Quantum probability drizzles
from billions of untouched realities
Alternate universes screaming of what
might have been
Lost loves and unresolved hates
Revolve to completion and resolution
In some unknown elsewhere

****

Don Zahorcik

RIDE

The small dining room was furnished elegantly. Under dim electric lights a small group of men sat around a long mahogany table. A tall, neatly uniformed man stood up at the end of the table. "A toast, gentlemen," Colonel Von Hauptmann said, "to a quick end to the war. Prosit!"

(continued)

Lieutenant Colonel Malcomn-Lewis, late of Her Majesty's Royal Navy, smiled back as he downed his drink. He knew if he wasn't here they would have toasted to victory, but the Prussian officers were ever-gracious "hosts." Their aristocratic behavior towards him, a fellow officer, almost belied the fact that he was their prisoner.

He had been adrift a week following the torpedoing of the H.M.S. Portsmouth. In the thick fog he had become separated from the other survivors, who were picked up almost immediately by a U Boat (he was told later). It was the Graf-Zeppelin Gottdammerung which came across him days later, wet but alive.

His treatment on-board had amazed him. Overexposure to propaganda had prepared him for the worst from the "Huns." Instead, he was treated with all the honor and respect due an enemy officer, and was even on friendly terms with Colonel Hauptmann. Over the course of the two weeks they had had many interesting conversations on a wide variety of subjects. The relatively routine nature of the airship's mission allowed for a lot of spare time for the crew. The Englishman allowed Von Hauptmann to practice his English, and in return the German officer introduced Malcomn-Lewis to the virtues of Wagner. They spent hours listening to the victrola recordings of "The Ring of the Nicbelung," "Siegfried," and "Tannhauser." "Wagner truly understood the glorious destiny of ther German people," Von Hauptmann proudly concluded.

A young lieutenant suddenly burst into the room. "Herr Colonel," he said nervously, "you're needed on the bridge." Jagged lightning flashed through the glass porthole on the wall. Wordlessly the dinner broke up as the officers left to resume their duties.

Malcomn-Lewis walked back to his room, his guard stationed outside. The guard was there for show only; the Englishman would never break his code of gentlemen's honor against his chivalrous "hosts." He realized, of course, that it was his duty as an officer to try to escape, but he accepted his captivity for the time being. He rationalized that there was little he could do for the war effort aloft in an enemy dirigible God-knows-where above the North Sea.

Colonel Von Hauptmann's face went white as he looked out the main viewport. A towering wall of rolling black clouds stretched across the sky as far as he could see. "What is our location?" he asked the navigator.

"Ten hours away from the coast," replied the navigator. Strange, bluish-green lightning bolts flashed amidst the boiling clouds. It was too late now to try to ride out the storm. "Half-speed ahead," the colonel ordered.

The great airship lurched, metal girders groaning as it pitched through the maelstrom. Deep rumbling thunder boomed constantly so that what little was said was shouted through hoarse throats. The storm seemed to last days, but the precision chronometer on the bridge stubbornly registered only a few hours. Then the airship was through the other side of the storm-front, as suddenly as they had come upon it in the first place.

There was a knock at the door. "Colonel Lewis," a voice summoned. "Colonel Von Hauptmann wishes to see you on the bridge." Malcomn-Lewis rose from his bed and followed the young orderly down the corridor.

When they arrived on the bridge, the Englishman saw the usually tidy and spotless bridge in bedlam. Maps and charts were strewn about every available counter-top, and several had fallen to the floor. "Ah, Colonel, I'd like your opinion on this," Von Hauptmann said, motioning towards the window. A hundred feet below, breakers were smashing along a dark coastline.

"Obviously," continued the German, "our instruments have been damaged by the storm; they indicate our position as 54 degrees north by 8 degrees east. If this were true, we would be able to see the lights of Wilhelmhaven by now." He gestured out the viewport. "As it is, this coast cannot be matched with any of our charts. You said before you've travelled years in these waters--perhaps you could identify . . ."

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, Colonel," Malcomn-Lewis said, "but for the life of me, I can't place it. Maybe the Dutch coast--it often changes, what with the dikes and floods . . ."

The German mulled this over for a moment, rubbing his brow in thought. "No, Holland is too far west from our last definite position. At any rate," he concluded, "we will continue eastwardly along the coast. If you wish you may stay here on the bridge until we ascertain our true position."

Hours later, the sun rose above the clouds, revealing a thick forest at the edge of the coastal beaches. In the distance was a large hill with a small village at the base and a castle on the top. "Perhaps we could obtain the fuel we need there," ventured the first officer.

The dirigible continued ahead slowly; it had been damaged in the storm. Far below a man watched, then galloped off on horseback towards the castle.

The village became closer. "I don't understand," said the navigator, "these

(continued)

Ride, continued

buildings, they're old, designed like some medieval history book descriptions I've seen, but they looked like they were built last year."

"Perhaps this is Denmark," queried the Englishman.

Suddenly a group of horsemen bolted out from the woods. Each carried a lit torch, and had a bow and arrows slung across his back.

"I don't like the looks of that," Von Hauptmann muttered, "Sergeant, get the megaphone and ask them the name of their village. In Danish."

"Yawohl, Herr Colonel," replied the sargeant who spoke fluent Danish.

Suddenly the horsemen drew arrows to their bows, and lit the tips with their torches. "Mein Gott!" cried Von Hauptmann, "the hydrogen cells!"

The arrows flew up into the gas bag. There was a tremendous burst of flame as it exploded. The horses reared and whinnied in terror as the huge flaming mass plummetted, hitting the ground heavily.

Out of the twisted wreckage scrambled the survivors: Malcomn-Lewis, Von Hauptmann, a short corporal, and a burly sargeant. They watched in silence as the flames quickly died out. The sargeant shouted, breaking the silence, "Look!"

The horsemen had gathered in a group and were watching them intently. "Treacherous dogs!" the German colonel screamed. He drew his pistol, a 9mm Luger, and opened fire. Two of the horsemen fell, then the rest returned fire with a volley of arrows. The corporal pitched forward, dead, and the other three retreated into the smoldering wreckage.

An hour passed slowly. Rummaging through the remains of the airship, they came up with a Manser rifle, seven rounds of ammunition, and the German colonel's ceremonial saber, given to him by Bismarck himself. The sargeant took the rifle, the Von Hauptmann his saber. He handed the Englishman his Luger. "Only four rounds left, I'm afraid."

In the distance more horsemen from the castle were massing. Colonel Von Hauptmann dug into a pile of debris, dragging his victrola and some thick one-sided records out from beneath. There was a wild look in his eyes as he began to crank up the damaged machine. The record was scratched and the player dented and cracked, but incredibly enough, the music came out strong. "The Ride of the Valkyries," Von Hauptmann shouted, waving his saber.

Malcomn-Lewis and the sargeant emptied their weapons into the oncoming enemy. Then the horsemen closed, broadswords flashing crimson. Von Hauptmann fell, blood oozing from a dozen lethal wounds. High above, in an azure sky, he saw flashes of gold. Blond hair falling about gleaming armor, the women warriors sat atop winged mounts. Screaming in harmony, the swooped down towards him . . .

****

David Moore

SYMBOLIC BABYLON

Symbolic Babylon
Harlots and whores
Riding red dragons
They follow strange mores

Symbolic Babylon
It's a pagan parade
Gods and goddesses
Sing serenades

Symbolic Babylon
They say represents sin
But such Christian air
Often seems thin

****

Randy Varju

DRIED SOULS

Dried souls falling from the
trees of salvation.
Carelessly raked into piles
and set fire to.
No mourning over their loss
until morning, when the smell
of their burning flesh can be smelled
through kitchen windows over breakfast.
Ashes returned to dust, covered by
the virgin white blanket of winter.
Nothing more than nutrients for the
soil of spring.

****

SPECIAL SECTION

These poems by John Stobart were collected haphazardly to provide some bulk to WORDEATER 42. The Staff does not endorse them. Stobart's also insecure about their merit, but hopes they will prove helpful.

"AND HE SWAM AND HE SWAM RIGHT OVER THE DAM"

"Write me a poem, baby."
That line seems to haunt me.
A book by H. Allen Smith, authority,
A taunt I use incessantly.

Write us a poem that we may see
The large and small of insanity.
The swift and sudden truth of me
The bold but gracious thrust of thee.
Write me, baby.
Baby, write me
Write me large for eternity
Etch my lines on the family's tree.
Raise me goosebumps in a shivaree
Make me laugh and cry religiously.
A poem, baby, write me.
Of me
For me
To me
Through me
Woo me
Do me.
Me, baby, write in harmony
Struggle for that euphony
Mind the syntax soothingly
Stretch the senses for no fee
Show the patches on my knee
Avoid puns floating on the sea
And rhymes that suckle-sting a bee
Never be flip or gauche or cutesy
Or idiomatic to a T.
Write me a poem, baby me.

****

JUST ANOTHER ROSE

The tranquil tea rose
Sedately waits,
Identical in its red
To four ovular place mats
Almost covering
A perfectly round,
Golden oak table.
Her fate is determined.
Her wait is slight
For her date
Soon or late,
With her mate,
Love and hate,
In the slate-colored
Dustbin of death.

****

U.S.S. STROGANOFF

A raw red block of beef
Skims and bobs about
The stainless steel sink,
A battleship of stew meat.
Frozen solid and needing
A quick-thaw,
It floats, just as the soap
Used to in the tub
But more charming because
Ivory is an established myth
To remember
And battleships too
Are obsolete,
But mainly due to its
Marvelous pennant
Done in red, white, and blue
With a silver edge stating,
"USDA Choice
Guaranteed Tender."

****

Stobart, continued

TODAY, FOR THE FIRST TIME

Today, for the first time
I saw a potato bloom,
Pale blue petals, saffron center,
Forgettable
Yet soon I'll be fifty,
A half century,
And there's so much around
Me I've failed to see

Had I not been lamenting
My failure to notice the
Wild Rose until now, its pink
Blooms having shriveled, I'd have missed
The potato again this year.

Some six years the rose grew
Where a Holiday Inn now stands.
Seeing myself as St. Francis of
The Flowers, I dug for seeming
Hours in the August heat to
Save it from the dozer's vicious blade.

Yearly since then I've celebrated myself,
A hero for that moment,
As reward for my many scratches then
And since due to my concern for
This pale, unscented bloom.

Today, though, the potato blooms
For me
And maybe for the once-courted, oft-
applauded rose I had forgotten.

****

OCTOBER LIGHT

October light
Dapples
And mutes,
Blowing kisses
With panache
And burnishing
Pyrrhic charms
From moribund drabness,
A patina prompting
Finality,
Chiaroscuroline
Aureole and corona
That tintype
Or tintinabulate
A luster
More eternal
Perhaps,
Due to its failure
To divine.

****

TWENTY-TWO YEARS OF STEW

"Too new stew won't do,"
You told me once,
With a still, small smile
Maybe twenty years back.
And just now, I think,
You told me true.

And viewing stew, thinking of you,
How must it always be:
Not fresh-cooked, fast,
Or even slowly simmered
But thought on early,
Forgot, then cherished anew.
Like most great brew, this stew
Must make at leisure.
The meat only major,
Not dominant.
Choice cuts rendered trim,
But never prime Cordon Bleu.

Tickling my tooth for you,
Gentle onion spicing thru
Sweet heat blend of herb,
Juices clutching hot
In golden carrots--
And potatoes too.

****

CHRISTMAS RUSH & MUMS

Sour cream 'n chive potatoes
With
Broiled lamb chops
Tripped the menu
Daintily through my mind,
So that my market basket
Went clank
And dumped
My mums out on the asphalt drive:
Oh, sunshine mums meant to lift
My wife from her depression!
A grand-pa type
Leaned down to assist,
Flamingo-like pose,
When a screech like sin
Invaded the scene
And a fender curved
Round his bender.
A dark brown boat
Glistening with lustre
Commanded by Betty Crocker Incarnate
Had fish-tailed around my protector,
And now stared at Spring Byington gone
rancid
Who with twisted-mouthed contempt
Shouted, "Old Goat, watch your ass!"
And I responded,
"Curb your mouth, you chauvinist tycoon!"
And the old guy frowned at me,
Offering the flowers and saying,
"That's no tycoon, that's my wife."

****

Stobart, continued

BIG RED BEAR

Big red bear,
Sitting stiff by the window
Looking neither out nor in.
What do you cost
In coin and carnage?
Who stuffed you in that storeroom and why?
For what carny did you panda?
Whose games of chance did you shill?
Or, gruesome carnation bruin,
What depravity of taste
Prompted your birth?
What fiend designed those plastic pop-eyes,
Goo, goo, goggily? What robot packed and
What cretin bred you en masse
To sell by the gross to the mine-shaft
minds?

****

RE-CYCLE

Mothers and teachers
I apologize.
I can't name the flowers
And know ought but the Big Dipper.
Why am I ignorant of musculature,
Latin, and Doc Savage?
Why blank on batik, Bach, and
Backgammon?
Why does my cerebellum
Reflect the Doppler effect
Blue or red,
And logarithms and the words
That abbreviate D. N. and A.?
Why am I such a dabbler?
So easily content with baby steps
And never anywhere near a leap?
My grasp exceeds my reach,
Large and small.

****

LAUGHING ALONE

Not alone,
I laugh
Alone--
Disturbing!
In theaters
At home
With friend and foe
At work and play--
Dismaying!
With others,
Of course, I guess, maybe
But even alone, alone?

Not
Not belonging
Not despair
Or even chagrin--
But the awkwardness registers
Somewhere out of mind
And synchrony
I

BEGRUDGING BIRDCRUMBS

They're a thankless lot
Those cardinals and starlings.
They grump about in pairs or flocks
Futzing and preening,
Strutting their stuff in the sun,
Ruffling and preening their fine-fed
feathers,
Swooping down
To the trough
And mixing with the commonplace sparrows
For the free grub
Then darting off again
Or lumbering aloft, like lead,
Heads turned by better pickings
Or bushes more posh.
The very least right they demand
Is suet and sunflower, a platform,
And a catless plot
In their ultimate flights
To sun-belted futures and commodities--
The American right!

****

KARMA

Just now it came to me,
"You know, you knew you were happy
A few days ago." Purely delighted,
throughout
And knowing what all was about.

For years I had tried to catch
Myself happy in the present tense,
Doubting the possibility.
And now I know I did.

But it somehow slipped away,
Leaving a sort of ache.
And I know it's gone
And suspect I won't recognize
It again if it returns
And I'm sure now I feel more
Sad than before I knew.

****

With the cacophonous folds
Skulled in my alter ego's tomb--
Galactic giggles
At my expense
And I fear the fare
Prohibits passage.

****

THE VOICE OF THE DRAGON

"I've seen the elephant,"
Spoke a mountain man.
"My stars!" a listener exclaims.
"And then the lightning spoke,"
Proclaims another,
Perhaps in the Year of the Turtle,
Maybe in the Moon of Spotted Tigers,
Or Albino Zebras.

In the seasons of the sun
Bereft or not
Of joy and fun,
Come the sorrows.
"The centaur is a mythological beast,"
Ends one story tainted with wit
But the "teeth-tiered sharks" run amok
Below it all.
And by the sign of Cancer's crab
Millions fall
Leaving a chorus of weeping women by the wall
And legionnaires trembling in a hall.
There's an eternal doorman
Guarding the turnstyles of life
Perhaps to enter is to rot
Optimism: maybe not.
Dress it in shadows with gargoyle glee
Shape it Protean
Or Hydra-headed
Tang it
Bang it in armor aging green--
Life's nicest monsters
Are dreamed not seen
But when the dragon speaks,
I listen
With my spine
And quake
In my liver
And rattle my stones
Sentient but insensible
Too groveling for groans.
I listen
But can only hear
The ticking dawn
Inside my bones.

****

A HYMN TO HOUBOLT*

When Houbolt became a road,
A monument of local good sense,
His LEM metamorphosed to toad
And his princely future went hence.

For Lincoln is, in part, a log
And St. Bernard, indeed, a dog
And Joliet, alas, a prison.

AND

While prison may also mean pen
And dog remains someone's best fren
And log is an item in accounting,
How-then-now, Princely Houbolt,
Your local LEM module of shame,
The warts of this toad sucked
To craters in road.
Your street a retreat from your fame.

*****

AND (SEVEN YEARS) LATER

The tractors would roll and smooth
This avenue leading to fame.
A triumph of labor just to disprove
The taunting thrust at Houbolt's name.

FOR

Crater-in-road popped back up in the
toad
And the prince still waits for the
kissing--

AND

The prisons and pen
The logs and the men
The dogs and the frens

FOR

The Saints are preserved in Joliet
The LEM is forgotten but not the VET
And Lincoln's redeemed as a savior
And Bernard abandoned his cask
Sobriety rules now in our favor
And our cars in content can now bask.

****

*John Houbolt, JJC alum, who designed the Lunar Exploratory Module, called LEM.

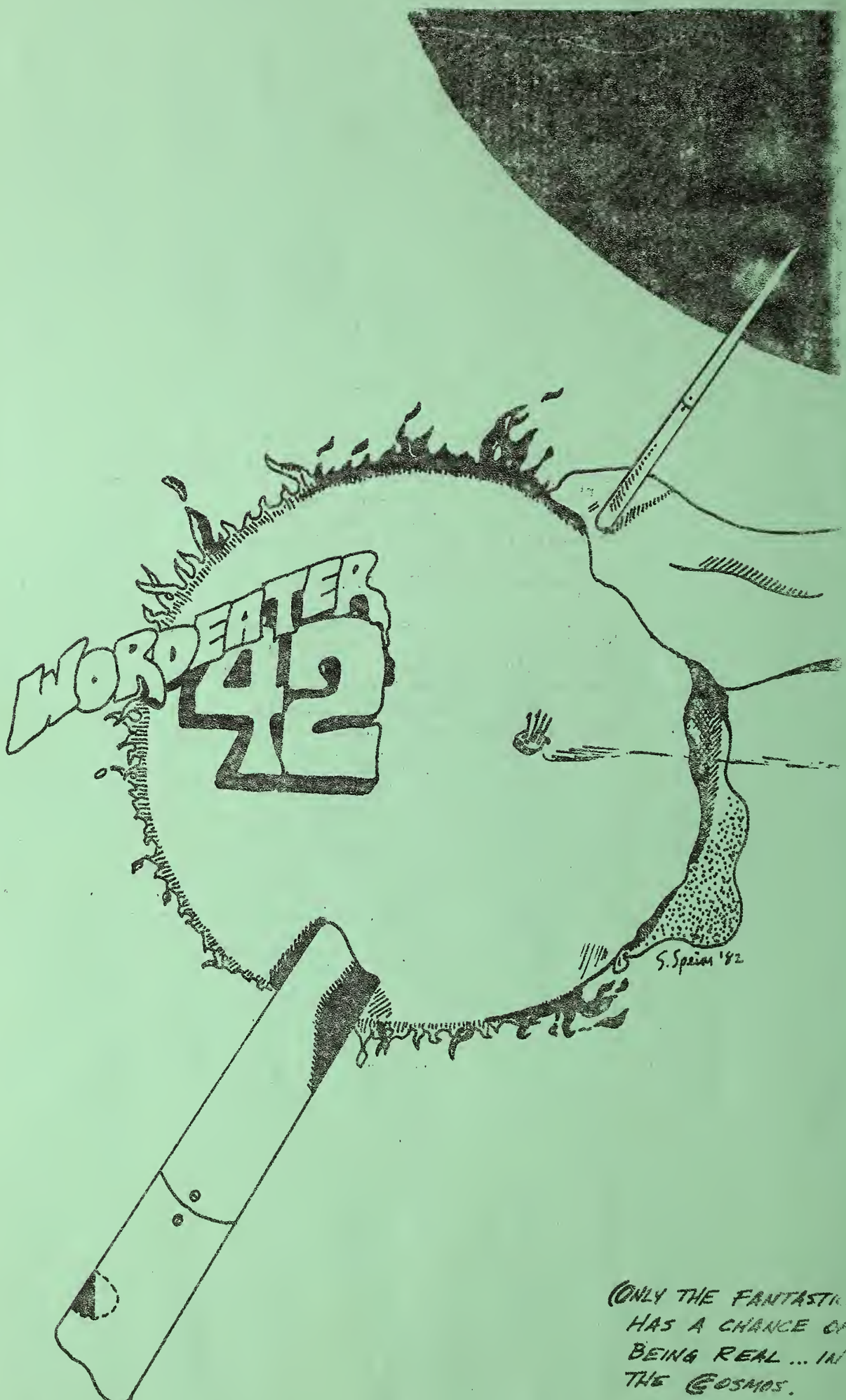
Stobart, continued

CREDO #6 OR #9

As cobalt lasers leech the bones to dawn:
Revolting worlds evolve and worm to life;
Earth's squirming birth affirms old Ether's spawn,
In viscose sea's amino-acid strife:
Being becomes finite in tomb and race;
An oozing harmony, the perfect hitch,
A fossil masking Plato's hide-in-face:
Reflection--COMIC ZEUS IN COSMIC ITCH!

How tempting now to crush this verse too thin:
My muse's mimic gold, not lyric blame,
Detect this surplus-woe as wisdom-skin;
Its body all silicone-will-for-fame:
This sonnet's double-helix, spittle-spite--
Dancing Gammas bent on dawn's internal night.

****



(ONLY THE FANTASTIC
HAS A CHANCE OF
BEING REAL ... IN
THE COSMOS.

b. calvert
'72